

Briefing report

Education Review Office (ERO): Education Review Office Response to *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together / Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātitini* – Final Report of the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce

Date	23 August 2019
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M19-36
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) note you requested that ERO provide advice on the impact and risks of moving fully to deliver on the actions recommended by the Taskforce; the most appropriate form for ERO; options to evolve ERO's approach over time and the potential to strengthen ERO's support for continuous improvement in the system. b) note this paper provides you with advice on potential directions for a strengthened monitoring and evaluation role in the education system. c) note attached appendix 1 – Development of ERO's Approach to Evaluation d) note attached Developing education evaluation document. e) agree to discuss the contents of this paper with ERO officials 	



Attachments:

**Education Review Office (ERO):
Education Review Office
Response to *Our Schooling
Futures: Stronger Together /
Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātitini* –
Final Report of the Tomorrow's
Schools Independent Taskforce**

Minister's Office to complete	
Noted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	
Date signed by Minister:	



Comments:

Our Ref: M19-36

23 August 2019

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

Education Review Office Response to *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together / Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinini* – Final Report of the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce

Purpose

1. The Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (the Taskforce) has completed its review of the compulsory schooling system and delivered its final report *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together / Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinini*.
2. In response to that report you have requested advice from the Education Review Office (ERO) that focuses on:
 - the impacts and risks of moving fully to the actions recommended for repurposing ERO
 - the most appropriate form for ERO as a repurposed agency
 - how the system could evolve over time to enable localised, ongoing self-review and support, while still providing assurance to the public and you as Minister about the quality of provision at the individual school level
 - how ERO could be positioned to strengthen the flow of information across the system in support of continuous improvement.
3. This report responds to your request.

What the Taskforce proposes for ERO

4. In considering the effectiveness of the New Zealand education system in promoting and supporting high quality provision and outcomes, and its capacity for improvement, the Taskforce report recommends significant changes to the role of ERO.
5. The Taskforce proposes that ERO is repurposed and renamed. The Education Evaluation Office (EEO) would operate as a Commission reporting to Parliament. The intention of this proposal is to ensure independence and increase the capacity of the organisation to report on the performance of the education system.
6. The role of the proposed EEO is to evaluate and report regularly on the performance of the education system from early learning through to tertiary. This role involves:

- evaluating the performance of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and other education agencies with a focus on progress in meeting specified national educational goals and the effectiveness of the relationships between agencies
- the discontinuation of 'event-based' school/kura reviews and a shift to an evaluation approach that samples schools/kura as part of understanding how well different agencies and the overall system are working
- the continuation of the review early learning/kohanga reo to ensure that quality is improved.

Response to the proposal to repurpose ERO

This section of the paper focuses on the impacts and risks of moving fully to the actions recommended for repurposing ERO and the most appropriate form for ERO as a repurposed agency.

External evaluation is critical in a learning system

7. Strong evaluation at every level is critical in a high performing system. Evaluation at a system level can identify areas of weakness or deficiencies and informs policy and investment decisions. Evaluation is also important in understanding the effectiveness of policy and programme implementation and their impact on student learning and outcomes.
8. Independence in system-wide policy and programme evaluation contributes to the credibility and transparency of the evaluation process and findings. The separation of the evaluation function from policy, implementation and purchase functions can provide a balance in terms of the personal, organisational and/or political imperative to demonstrate success and the reality of the change and improvement process.
9. Recent evidence related to successful education systems suggests that both external and internal accountability are important in achieving equity and excellence in learner outcomes.¹
10. From an external accountability perspective ERO currently provides statutory independent assurance that education institutions have the policies and procedures in place to give effect to legal and regulatory requirements. ERO's external evaluation cycle supports both accountability and improvement by bringing an independent, external lens to the quality of learning opportunities and outcomes for students and the school conditions that support or limit those outcomes.
11. ERO also promotes internal accountability and improvement. Schools and their communities are required to engage in an ongoing process of internal evaluation focused on improving outcomes for all their students. The integration of internal and external evaluation positions the education institution as the agent for change and supports the development of professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement. ERO also leads evaluation capacity building opportunities within the education sector.
12. ERO's evaluation reports provide public evaluative information to parents, whanau and communities, educators and the Government about the quality and effectiveness of education provision.

¹ Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23 (15), 1-22.

The form of an independent evaluation agency should be linked with Ministerial accountability

13. The Taskforce envisages the proposed EEO as an independent agency free from political influence with a requirement to report to Parliament on a regular basis.
14. This organisational form is similar to that of the Commission for the Environment.² The Environment Commissioner is appointed by, and reports directly to, Parliament. Involvement in the policy development process or engagement with Ministers by the commission is limited.
15. An alternative model is that of the Productivity Commission which operates as a Crown Entity with a Board³ appointed by the Minister for Economic Development. The Minister determines the Commission's programme of work and is required to release the findings and recommendations of any Commission reports to the House of Representatives. At the same time the Department of Statistics operates as a core government department, under its own legislation, with considerable independence for political influence in terms of its oversight of the statistics system and statistical reporting.
16. Both Commission models, described above, provide greater accountability to Parliament and potentially greater independence. However, the proposal to reposition the external evaluation of schools in this way:
 - overlooks the current accountability and oversight mechanisms that already exist for the Ministry and other education agencies⁴
 - does not take account of the potential precedence created for other Ministerial portfolios
 - confuses the role of the Executive and the Legislature
 - does not recognise the independence of ERO's role since its establishment in 1990.
17. Under the current arrangements Parliament's role ensures Ministerial accountability and transparency for the policy settings that underpin the New Zealand system. As Minister of Education you have oversight of the performance of the agencies that report to you and ultimate responsibility for the quality and performance of the education system.
18. ERO currently has statutory independence as a government agency. While as Minister you can ask the Chief Review Officer (CRO) to undertake investigations or evaluations related to specific areas of the system, the CRO can also determine and prioritise areas for investigation or evaluation. Strong protocols are in place to manage external influence on the publication of ERO's findings which are released by the CRO.
19. As Minister you have, through the CRO, access to a contestable source of information and evaluation capacity related to programme and system performance. This would be lost in shifting to the form of an Education Evaluation Agency that reports to Parliament. Such a shift would also change the nature of ERO's working relationship with other educational agencies. While ERO currently maintains its independent role, it also seeks opportunities in that role to work with and influence other education agencies to drive improvement.

² See Environment Act 1986: Part 1

³ Established under the Crown Entities Act (2004)

⁴ For example, Public Finance Act (1989); State Sector Act (1989); Office of the Auditor General; Parliamentary Select Committee.

20. Changes to ERO's form are not necessary to progress change. Such an approach would consume significant resources and capability that could be better utilised.

ERO's functions could be strengthened

21. ERO's review and evaluation functions could be strengthened through legislation. This would involve setting expectations for undertaking internal evaluation and responding to ERO's external evaluation findings and recommendations.

22. ERO could also be required in legislation to report regularly to Parliament through the Minister of Education on the quality and performance of the early learning, school and tertiary sectors.⁵ As Minister of Education you are currently required to report on the performance of the school sector annually under section s. 87B of the Education Act 1989.⁶ The report does not however contain qualitative evaluative material on the school sector.

23. ERO currently has no mandate to undertake evaluation in the tertiary sector. The Taskforce recommends that the EEO publicly report on the performance of the education system through to tertiary, focusing on the effectiveness of system settings at the vocational and tertiary levels.

24. There is currently no mechanism in the system for this function. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) monitor the performance of individual providers. Evaluation of the effectiveness of tertiary policy settings takes place mainly through the policy process and our overall approach is not comprehensive.

25. There are opportunities to improve system monitoring and evaluation so that we have a better picture of pathways through the system and can improve support around key linkage points. A strengthened evaluation and monitoring approach at the tertiary level could increase our understanding of, for example, the effectiveness of apprenticeship or trade training systems or the implementation and impact of the government's Tertiary Education Strategy.

Strengthening System Evaluation for Improvement

This section of the paper focuses on how ERO could be positioned to strengthen the flow of information across the system in support of continuous improvement.

26. In 2011 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) *Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand*⁷ identified the need to strengthen the consistency and coherence of the various components in our system framework for assessment and evaluation at student, teacher, school and system level to support overall improvement.

27. A lack of coherence in functions associated with external accountability at different levels of the system and associated data/information gathering approaches, limits the system's capacity to implement a strategic and responsive approach to improvement.

⁵ See, for example, OfSTED's annual statement on the quality of the English school and early learning sectors.

⁶ This section of the Act was put in place so that the House did not have to receive and debate individual school annual reports and financial statements as required of Crown Entities.

⁷ Nusche, D., Laveault, D., MacBeath, J., & Santiago, P. (2012). *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand*. Paris: OECD.

28. Longstanding issues include:

- evaluation functions are fragmented and spread across a range of education agencies creating multiple reporting requirements for schools and challenges in accessing data/information.
- the system is knowledge rich in terms of the information that is generated and available to the education sector, but there is no mechanism for bringing evaluative information from different levels of the system and education contexts together so that it is accessible and can be used for different purposes
- the approach to evaluation at the system level is not purposefully designed and the information generated is not systematically used for system planning, prioritising and improvement.

29. Compared with other jurisdictions, there is also little investment in longitudinal studies or deep investigations of the effectiveness of education policies and programmes. Few evaluation studies in the New Zealand education system address questions related to impact or outcomes.

30. The current approach to the provision of government funding for evaluation often embeds evaluation within the programme. The evaluation is commissioned and overseen by those designing and implementing the initiative. Although this approach can support rapid feedback loops into programme design and implementation, it often lacks transparency, is of poor quality and does not contribute to system wide learning or knowledge building. It can also lead to over-stating the success of an initiative due to personal, organisational or political imperatives

31. In addition, evaluations that focus on a specific initiative are not built off a systemic, coherent framework that would enable the comparison of programme impact and outcomes, limiting the opportunity for Ministers to weigh up investment decisions. The lack of a systematic approach also limits system level knowledge building and dissemination about what works in improving outcomes.

32. Resolving these challenges would require a commitment by government to the systematic review and evaluation of major programmes and investments on a cyclical basis. New policy initiatives would have provision for both process and impact evaluation and monitoring. The separation of system evaluation and monitoring activities from policy development, purchase and implementation would improve transparency and the quality and utility of the evaluation investment.

Consolidating ERO's functions in system evaluation

33. The Taskforce's proposals recognise the importance of evaluation in education system improvement. The proposal to repurpose ERO with a mandate for system wide and programme level review and evaluation, reporting to Parliament, highlights the need to clarify system accountabilities, improve the coherence of data/information gathering activities and use evaluation at the system level better for strategic decision making and improvement.

34. As the government's education evaluation agency, ERO is well positioned to further develop its role in system wide evaluation and monitoring. A consolidated evaluation and monitoring role could include:

- monitoring system progress in meeting Government's vision and goals, including performance in relation to the national education learning priorities (NELPs)
- contributing to the identification of system wide priorities for action
- building the knowledge base about what works to improve outcomes at system, programme and practice levels

- supporting evidence informed decision making for system learning and improvement
- providing a strong evaluation approach in sector wide pilot studies and trials
- developing and embedding evaluative thinking in education work at every level of the system: existing programmes and practice, new initiatives and system reform.

Establishing an agreed framework for research and evaluation across education agencies

35. Achieving these shifts would require the development of an agreed framework for the system with a multi-year strategic research and evaluation programme. This programme would reflect government priorities and strategic actions needed for system improvement and require a sustainable funding stream. The strategic purpose of such an investment would be to improve our knowledge and understanding about what is and is not working and why, and ensure an appropriate balance between short and medium term and nationally and internationally focused projects. Such a framework would complement the government's medium-term work programme and goals for education.
36. ERO would recommend that the programme be agreed to by the Minister on an cyclical, annual basis. The development and implementation of such an approach for the system would require a collaborative approach between the Ministry, the evaluation agency and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER).

Developing Approaches to Evaluation

This section of the paper focuses on how the system could evolve over time to enable a more localised, ongoing self-review and support approach to evaluation, while still providing assurance to the public and you as Minister about the quality of provision at the individual school level

37. You have identified the importance of clear insight into, and assurance about, the quality of education provision in each school. You have also requested advice about how the system could develop over time from the "event-based" approach described by the Taskforce to a more localised, ongoing self-review and support approach to evaluation.
38. ERO's approach to external evaluation has changed significantly since the agency was established in 1990. Government policy settings, reduced resourcing, Ministerial reviews⁸ and ERO's strategic leadership have all been important influences on the agency's development and approach to external evaluation (See attached Appendix 1). Changing expectations and functions have required organisational responsiveness and nimbleness.
39. From an evaluation perspective ERO's approach to external evaluation has shifted over time to an improvement-oriented approach, while maintaining compliance/accountability-oriented functions.

⁸ Ministry of Education (1990). *Today's Schools: a review of the education reform implementation process*. Report prepared for the Minister of Education, April 1990.

Austin, M., Parata-Blane, A., & Edwards, W. (1997). *Achieving excellence: A review of the education external evaluation services*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Rodger, S., Holden, J., Meade, A., Millar, A., & Smith, B. (2000). *Report to the Minister of Education: A review of the roles and responsibilities of the Education Review Office*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

40. ERO's improvement-oriented approach integrates internal and external evaluation.⁹ The starting point for external evaluation is the institution's cycle of evaluation for improvement: developments since the last evaluation, the current state and future developments.
41. ERO agrees that there remains considerable scope for building the evaluation capability of the sector and for strengthening the ability of institutions to develop and implement sound strategic planning, implementation and evaluation cycles for improvement.

ERO is well positioned to support an approach to evaluation that builds sector evaluation capability and capacity over time

42. In the last four years developments related to ERO's methodology and professional practice have laid a strong foundation for moving towards a more *localised, ongoing self-review and support approach to evaluation*. These developments are reflected in a range of resources that support schools in their evaluative thinking and activities (See attached *Developing education evaluation document*).

What matters most in improving learner outcomes

43. ERO's *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success* (2016) bring together the evidence about what matters most in improving learner outcomes. The indicators and associated examples of effective practice are designed to be used by both schools and evaluators to promote improvement. *Improvement in Action*, a series of film clips, brings the evaluation indicators to life and illustrates how effective schools improve. ERO's Best Practice series identifies and describes contexts and practices where educators are improving equity and excellence of outcomes for learners.
44. We have also recently briefed you on our current work in developing quality indicators in the early childhood sector, to be used as the basis for quality improvement planning and evaluation.

Doing and using evaluation for improvement

45. ERO's national evaluation work continues to show gaps in the knowledge and expertise needed to effectively do and use assessment and evaluation for improvement. *Effective School Evaluation: how to do and use evaluation for improvement* (published jointly with the Ministry of Education) and *Internal Evaluation: Good Practice* are companion documents to *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success*.
46. In developing these resources, ERO carried out a series of case studies involving schools that showed an improvement trajectory in outcomes for Māori and Pacific students and exemplary internal evaluation. The primary purpose of these resources is to support schools in their internal evaluation work and "ensure more consistently effective ... practice across New Zealand" (2012, p. 104).¹⁰

⁹ Education Review Office (2018). *External Education Evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand: Principles of Practice*. Wellington: Crown Copyright.

¹⁰ Nusche, D., Laveault, D., MacBeath, J., & Santiago, P. (2012). *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand*. Paris: OECD.

47. *Effective School Evaluation: how to do and use evaluation for improvement* describes effective internal evaluation, what it involves and how to go about it in ways that will enhance educational outcomes for learners.
48. *Internal Evaluation: Good Practice Capability* unpacks the evaluation processes and school conditions that support effective evaluation. The case studies show the shifts in practice during schools' improvement journeys as they developed their use of evaluation to improve learner outcomes.

Building evaluation capability and capacity

49. There is a significant gap across the system in the availability of effective external expertise to build evaluation capability and capacity. ERO currently responds to the demand for capability and capacity building through the provision of workshops for other agencies, and for groups of schools and early childhood services. ERO also leads sessions at national and international conferences related to evaluation and contributes to university programmes. ERO's evaluation knowledge and expertise is also increasingly sought in by a range of jurisdictions both in the development of external evaluation approaches and in the training of evaluators.
50. Evaluation capability and capacity building opportunities could be expanded significantly in education. ERO is well positioned to lead a system wide initiative that builds evaluation leadership and expertise in each region, and with our Pacific partners. This could be done through the setting up of a national development team and could align well with proposed partnering initiatives.

ERO has the capability and capacity to further develop and differentiate its evaluation approaches

51. ERO has continued to develop and differentiate its evaluation approaches in response to a range of education and evaluation influences (See Appendix 1).

Network and cluster approaches to evaluation

52. The *Tomorrow's Schools* review highlights the need to strengthen networks, interdependence and trust across the system.
53. ERO has undertaken a range of network, cluster and community-oriented evaluations in specific contexts over time: for example, *Improving Schooling in Mangere and Otara* (1996) through to *Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour: governing and managing RTLB clusters* (2018). ERO has also undertaken evaluation studies focused on successful collaboration in *Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako*.¹¹
54. ERO has undertaken preliminary work to expand its evaluation approach to focus on networks, clusters and/or communities. Such an approach would involve a collaborative, improvement-oriented approach to design and on-site work and provide opportunity for participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the process. The methodology could include thematic light sampling across all schools in a cluster. It could also include more in-depth investigation where national and local information identified risks and/or issues that required intervention. The investigation of wider social influences on education provision could also be undertaken.

¹¹ See *Collaboration in Practice: Insights into Implementation* (2019)

55. Similar approaches have been developed and undertaken in other jurisdictions, for example, the polycentric approach in Northern Ireland and thematic reviews of education communities in Scotland.

Evaluation in Māori medium contexts

56. The Taskforce identifies the need to strengthen school provision through Māori medium pathways. ERO's unique position as an external evaluation agency, enables regular access to both Māori medium and bicultural education environments. This means that ERO is well positioned to provide insights into what works well in the provision of education through the medium of te reo Māori.
57. Te Uepū ā-Motu is ERO's dedicated Māori immersion review team. The team has specific knowledge in te reo and tikanga Māori capability, deep insight into the provision of immersion education within a te ao Māori environment and knowledge and expertise in education and evaluation. ERO has developed distinct external evaluation approaches for different Māori medium settings including Te Aho Matua Kura Kaupapa Māori, Kura-ā-Iwi and Kōhanga Reo. These approaches have been developed with Māori and are considered world leading in indigenous education.¹² This indigenous evaluation work is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that education evaluations are *in Māori, by Māori, with Māori and for Māori*.
58. ERO has established methodologies and indicators for use within Māori medium settings. Each of the three sets has been con-constructed, recognising the uniqueness of the education provision, the value placed on learner outcomes and the contribution of whānau, hapū and iwi. These evaluation methodologies acknowledge marae protocol of encounter and the value of korero kanohi ki te kanohi.
59. ERO has established a strong external evaluation reputation in Māori medium education provision. The indicators and methodologies reflect expectations about the place of te reo Māori, and the work of whānau, hapū and iwi. This ensures that ERO is well positioned to provide valuable insights about how kōhanga reo, puna reo, Kura a Iwi and Kura Te Aho Matua support the revitalisation and resurgence of te reo Māori, and actively connect with whānau, hapū and iwi.

Diagnostic evaluation for improvement

60. ERO's recent work in diagnostic evaluation has provided important insights into strengthening the links between evaluation and support for improvement where national and local information identifies risks and/or issues that require intervention.
61. The diagnostic evaluation approach requires specialist expertise with a deep understanding of evaluation, education and organizational change and development. The approach is focused and specific in identifying priorities for improvement, the actions that need to be taken and the resources required to improve provision in each school and establish a positive improvement trajectory. In most cases a simultaneous focus on curriculum, assessment and teaching, professional capability and leadership and management is required.
62. Each school develops a plan of action built off the diagnostic assessment with term-by-term targets. ERO monitors the improvement process closely, maintaining a diagnostic approach, providing real time feedback to the school and Ministry and recommending variations to the interventions, if

¹² ERO shares its methodologies and approaches in a range of international settings, for example, the Culturally Responsive Assessment and Evaluation (CREA) forum.

required, to escalate the pace of improvement or the scale of intervention needed. The findings highlight the gains that can be made through strengthening the links between external education evaluation and institutional improvement.

63. The examples described in paragraphs 50-60 show how ERO can develop and adapt evaluation approaches that respond to specific contexts. The examples also point to the need to consider the use of specialist teams in developing and implementing such approaches.

Developing evaluation expertise

64. Shifts in ERO's external evaluation approach have changed the nature of the reviewer/evaluator role and created increasing demands in terms of the knowledge and expertise required to be effective. ERO has also developed evidence-based resources for internal use to support the development of evaluation practice.

65. The capabilities that ERO evaluators need to undertake and deliver high quality evaluations are highly specialised, require significant investment in capability building and ongoing oversight. In the diverse education contexts that ERO works the requirements for this specialist workforce are articulated in *Capabilities for High Quality Evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand (2017)*. This resource is designed to assist individual evaluators in the development of their knowledge and expertise and support high standards and consistency of professional evaluation practice.

66. *External Education Evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand: Principles of Practice (2018)* articulates the key features of ERO's approach and the principles that guide how ERO evaluators do education evaluation. The principles are intended to guide the development of evaluation practice in the field as well as the design and implementation of ERO's evaluation frameworks and methodologies.

67. These resources could also be useful in strengthening evaluation capability and capacity across the system.

Conclusion

68. As we have described in this paper, ERO currently plays a strong and important role in the New Zealand education system. It is recognised for its work nationally and internationally. As outlined, we believe ERO's contribution to the system can be further enhanced. This includes taking a stronger role in system wide evaluation and monitoring, and evolving and shifting the focus of our work with individual providers and entities.

69. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of this paper further with you and how our contribution could be strengthened to better support improvement in our system.

Recommendations

70. It is recommended that you:

- a) **note** you requested that ERO provide advice on the impact and risks of moving fully to deliver on the actions recommended by the Taskforce; the most appropriate form for ERO; options to evolve ERO's approach over time and the potential to strengthen ERO's support for continuous improvement in the system.

noted

- b) **note** this paper provides you with advice on potential directions for a strengthened monitoring and evaluation role in the education system. **noted**
- c) **note** attached appendix 1 – *Development of ERO's Approach to Evaluation* **noted**
- d) **note** attached *Developing education evaluation* document. **noted**
- e) **agree** to discuss the contents of this paper with ERO officials. **agree/disagree**



Nicholas Pole
Chief Executive

NOTED/APPROVED



Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

25 / 8 / 19